

Message Text

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O R 271637Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2859
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TEL AVIV 5646

NEA/IAI FOR AMBASSADOR LEWIS

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS PEPR, PINT, IS
SUBJ: THE BEGIN VISIT: IS A CHANGE POSSIBLE IN THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT?

REF: TEL AVIV 5570
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FOLLOWING IS THE UNEXPURGATED VERSION OF POLITICAL
COUNSELLOR JOHN CRUMP'S SWAN SONG FOLLOWING TWO
YEARS OF TRANQUIL SERVICE IN ISRAEL. HIS VIEWS ARE
ENTIRELY HIS OWN AND HAVE SUFFERED NOT THE SLIGHTEST
NICK FROM THE EDITORIAL SCALPEL OF THE MANAGEMENT OF
THIS EMBASSY:

1. SUMMARY: THERE IS AN EXPECTANCY IN ISRAELI POLITICAL LIFE TODAY, A SENSE OF WAITING FOR IMPENDING CHANGES. THE ISRAELI POLITICAL SYSTEM IS ESSENTIALLY LETHARGIC AND HAS BEEN SLOW TO REACT TO PRESSURES FOR A CHANGE IN FOREIGN POLICY WHICH HAVE RECENTLY BEEN INDUCED INTO THE SYSTEM. THESE PRESSURES EMANATE FROM THE U.S., FROM THE ARABS, AND FROM WITHIN ISRAEL. IN CONSIDERING WHETHER THESE PRESSURES CAN BRING ABOUT A CHANGE IN THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT, WE MUST BE AWARE THAT BEGIN'S POSITION IS SOMEWHAT WEAKER NOW THAN IT WAS PREVIOUSLY, THAT HIS SUPPORT IS RATHER NARROWER THAN INDICATED BY POLLS AND THAT HE HIMSELF IS LESS SELF-CONFIDENT THAN HE WAS PREVIOUSLY. OUR JUDGMENT IS THAT CHANGES CAN PROBABLY BE EXPECTED - THEY MAY NOT COME SOON AND THEY MAY BE GRADUAL RATHER THAN DRAMATIC, BUT WE SHOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF WE ENCOUNTER CHANGES IN THE MONTHS AHEAD. SUCH CHANGES, WHEN THEY OCCUR, COULD INCLUDE BEGIN'S DEPARTURE, RESIGNATION OF MINISTERS, OR CHANGES IN POLICIES. END SUMMARY.

2. IN A COMPANION CABLE (REFTEL) WE EXAMINED THE CURRENT DEBATE IN ISRAEL REGARDING PEACE NEGOTIATIONS AND CONCLUDED THAT THAT DEBATE HAS NOT YET PRODUCED ANY FIRM CHANGES IN POLICY. THE PURPOSE OF THIS MESSAGE IS TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY SUCH CHANGES SHOULD BE EXPECTED IN THE FUTURE.

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3. FACTORS FOR STABILITY: THE ISRAELI POLITICAL SYSTEM CONTAINS A GREAT AMOUNT OF INERTIA AND IS SLOW TO ACCOMMODATE PRESSURES FOR CHANGE: ONE SHIFT IN 29 YEARS ILLUSTRATES THAT ISRAELIS DO NOT CHANGE GOVERNMENTS EASILY. THE FAILURE OF THE LABOR PARTY TO PRESENT ITSELF AS A NEAR-TERM, CREDIBLE ALTERNATIVE ALSO CONTRIBUTES TO THE PRESENT STABILITY. THE DESIRE OF COALITION MINISTERS TO REMAIN IN OFFICE ALSO IS A FACTOR FOR STABILITY. IT IS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT AFTER 29 YEARS IN THE POLITICAL WILDERNESS, THE LIKUD IS NOT KEEN ON YIELDING POWER, NOR DOES IT THINK IT HAS BEEN GIVEN SUFFICIENT TIME AT THE HELM TO SHOW WHAT IT CAN DO. LIKUD MINISTERS PROFESS TO BELIEVE THAT CHAOS WOULD RESULT IN ISRAEL IF BEGIN OR HIS LEADERSHIP WERE SUDDENLY TO DISAPPEAR.

4. FACTORS FOR CHANGE: AT THE SAME TIME, A NUMBER OF PRESSURES FOR CHANGE HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED RECENTLY INTO THE ISRAELI POLITICAL SYSTEM; THESE PRESSURES COME FROM ABROAD, FROM ARABS, AND FROM WITHIN ISRAEL. THE PRESSURES FROM ABROAD -- FROM THE U.S. AND EUROPE -- HAVE

BEEN PRIMARILY IN THE FORM OF COMMENTS TO ISRAELI
LEADERS DURING VISITS AND COMMUNICATIONS; THESE
COMMENTS RANGE FROM PRESIDENT CARTER'S SIX NOTES TO
CEAUSESCU'S MEETING WITH DAYAN TO SIMONET'S NOTE TO

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DAYAN EARLIER THIS YEAR. THESE PRESSURES ALSO INCLUDE
DISCUSSIONS WITH INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE JEWISH
COMMUNITY IN THE U.S., SUCH AS LAST WEEK'S VISIT OF
PROMINENT AMERICAN JEWS TO ISRAEL (SEE TEL AVIV 5330).
THE PRESSURE FROM ARABS EMANATES PRIMARILY FROM EGYPT
VIA WEIZMAN BUT ALSO FROM ADVERSE EVENTS SUCH AS HUSSEIN'S
REMARKS TO HIS NEW NATIONAL CONSERVATIVE COUNCIL AND
THE SAUDIS' PLANS TO BUY F-15S.
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5. PROBABLY THE MOST EFFECTIVE PRESSURE IN THE LONG RUN, HOWEVER, IS THAT WHICH IS BUILDING UP WITHIN ISRAEL ITSELF. PEACE NOW IS THE MOST NOTABLE AND NEWSWORTHY BUT THERE ARE OTHER EXPRESSIONS OF DISQUIET AND CONCERN. SOME OF THESE CONCERNS DEAL ONLY WITH DOMESTIC ISSUES, SUCH AS THE CONTINUING LABOR UNREST, THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO TAKE DECISIVE ACTIONS ON ECONOMIC QUESTION, AND BEGIN'S GROSS MISHANDLING OF GETTING HIS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ELECTED. OTHER CONCERNS DEAL WITH EXTERNAL ISSUES, SUCH AS THE CRITICISM OF THE LEBANON OPERATION, REGARDING BOTH ITS GOALS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF THE OPERATION ITSELF. THESE CONCERNS CONTRIBUTE TO AN INCREASING QUESTIONING OF THE FUTURE OF THE GOVERNMENT. AS AMNON BARZILAI WROTE LAST WEEKEND IN HAARETZ, "THE CRACKS IN THE RULING PARTY, WHICH ARE A THREAT TO THE ENTIRE STRUCTURE, RAISE DOUBTS WHETHER LIKUD WITHOUT BEGIN AT ITS HEAD HAS A FUTURE."

6. WHEN WE SPEAK OF FERMENT AND DISQUIET, WE DO NOT MEAN TO IMPLY THAT THE COUNTRY IS SEETHING AND BUBBLING ON THE VERGE OF ANARCHY OR REVOLUTION. ON THE CONTRARY, THE BASIC INERTIA WE MENTIONED ABOVE RESTRAINS THE ISRAELIS' NATURAL PROCLIVITIES TOWARD TALK AND DISCUSSION OF IMPORTANT ISSUES. IN SUM, THERE IS A GENERAL AIR OF WAITING, OF EXPECTANCY THAT SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN TO DISPEL THE VAGUE FEELING OF DISCONTENT CAUSED BY THE APPEARANCE OF THE PRESSURES WE MENTIONED.

7. CAN THESE PRESSURES BRING CHANGE IN THE BEGIN GOVERNMENT? A STRONG PRIME MINISTER SUCH AS BEGIN, IN A POLITICAL SYSTEM SLOW TO CHANGE, UNDER PRESSURES FROM OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY WHICH HAVE THE EFFECT PRIMARILY OF

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RALLYING ITS CITIZENS TO HIS SUPPORT, WOULD GENERALLY BE UNLIKELY TO CHANGE HIS POLICIES. WE BELIEVE THIS JUDGEMENT MUST BE QUALIFIED BY SEVERAL FACTORS: BEGIN IS IN A SOMEWHAT WEAKER POSITION NOW; MANY ISRAELIS HAVE BEGUN TO SEE HIM AS STILL AND STUBBORN WHEN THE TIMES REQUIRE FLEXIBILITY AND INNOVATION. HIS POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IS PROBABLY BASED ON A LOWER MARGIN OF SUPPORT AMONG THE PEOPLE THAN IS GENERALLY ACCEPTED AND THE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS THEMSELVES, ACCORDING TO POLLSTER HANOCH SMITH, ARE VERY SUSPECT. IN ADDITION, BEGIN'S DECISION REGARDING

PEACE NEGOTIATIONS MUST BE MADE UNDER STRICT CONSTRAINTS. IF HE IS PERCEIVED TO BE GIVING TOO MUCH, HE IS CRITICIZED FROM THE RIGHT; IF HE IS THOUGHT TO BE TOO RIGID, HE IS CRITICIZED FROM THE LEFT. HE MUST, THEREFORE, FOLLOW A NARROW PATH. ALSO, HE HAS LOST CONFIDENCE ABOUT HIS ROLE IN HISTORY. ONE WELL-REGARDED OBSERVER TOLD US RECENTLY THAT BEGIN IS CHANGED MAN SINCE HE ASSUMED THE OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER; HE HAS LOST CONFIDENCE IN HIMSELF AND HAS BEEN SHAKEN IN HIS BELIEF THAT HE WOULD BE THE THIRD PILLAR IN A TRILOGY OF ZIONIST LEADERS CONSISTING OF HERZL, BEN-GURION AND HIMSELF.

8. INCIDENTALLY, WE WOULD ADD THAT BEGIN IS NOT IMMUNE TO THE CURRENTS OF UNREST WHICH ARE CIRCULATING IN THE COUNTRY. HE RISES EARLY EACH MORNING -- WE ARE TOLD HE USUALLY IS AWAKE BY FIVE O'CLOCK -- AND SPENDS AT LEAST AN HOUR GOING CAREFULLY THROUGH THE MORNING PAPERS. HE NOTES WHAT COMMENTATORS AND EDITORIALISTS ARE SAYING ABOUT HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT; HE IS CERTAINLY AWARE OF INCREASING EDITORIAL CALLS FOR FLEXIBILITY. HIS READING, PLUS HIS CONTINUED MEETINGS WITH LARGE NUMBERS OF HIS COUNTRYMEN, HELP HIM TO KEEP HIS FINGER ON THE PULSE OF THE NATION.

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9. TAKING ALL THESE FACTORS INTO CONSIDERATION, OUR
OPINION IS THAT CHANGES IN BEGIN'S GOVERNMENT CAN
INDEED BE EXPECTED. THESE CHANGES MIGHT NOT OCCUR
SOON -- THEY MAY TAKE PLACE IN MONTHS RATHER THAN WEEKS
AND THEY MAY BE GRADUAL RATHER THAN DRAMATIC. HOWEVER,
THE PRESSURES WHICH HAVE BEEN INTRODUCED CANNOT BE
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CONTAINED WITHOUT SOME KIND OF RESPONSE. (WE ARE
COMPELLED TO ADD THAT NOT EVERYONE AGREES WITH THIS
PREDICTION. SOME ISRAELIS DO; OTHERS AGREE UP TO A
POINT BUT SAY THAT THE FINAL IMPETUS FOR A POLICY
CHANGE HERE MUST COME FROM THE OUTSIDE. CURRENT
DISCUSSIONS IN ISRAEL CAN SET THE STAGE BUT AN OUTSIDE
OCCURRENCE -- SUCH AS A NEW INITIATIVE BY SADAT, A
SUDDEN AND UNEXPECTED WILLINGNESS OF HUSSEIN TO
NEGOTIATE, A PUBLICLY ANNOUNCED U.S. PLAN -- WILL BE
REQUIRED TO ENCOURAGE ISRAELIS TO OVERCOME THEIR
RELUCTANCE TO ACT.) THE FERMENT INDUCED BY THESE
PRESSURES WILL CONTINUE AND WE MUST EXPECT THAT IT WILL
SPILL OVER ONTO US OCCASIONALLY; THE U.S., AND PROBABLY
EUROPE AND THE ARABS, WILL BE ACCUSED OF INTERFERING
IN ISRAEL'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS AS IT STRUGGLES WITH THESE
DECISIONS.

10. THE NATURE OF THE CHANGES IS DIFFICULT TO PREDICT -
THEY MAY BE PERSONNEL CHANGES OR THEY MAY BE POLICY
CHANGES OR THEY MAY BE BOTH: BEGIN MAY FIND HIS
PERSONAL POSITION TO BE UNTENABLE AND DECIDE TO LEAVE
RATHER THAN COMPROMISE HIS PRINCIPLES. SIMILARLY, SOME
OF HIS MINISTERS MAY DECIDE THEY CAN NO LONGER AGREE
WITH BEGIN -- EITHER BECAUSE HE IS MOVING TOO FAST OR
NOT MOVING FAST ENOUGH -- AND MAY RESIGN. ALTERNATIVELY,
BEGIN MAY DECIDE HE WILL REMAIN IN OFFICE AND CAN ACCEPT
CHANGES OF POLICY. HE WOULD ARGUE IN SUCH A CASE
THAT IT IS OBVIOUS THE CHANGES REFLECT THE WILL OF THE
ISRAELI CITIZENS.

11. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S. - WE CAN ONLY WAIT AND

CONTINUE TO MAKE OUR VIEWS KNOWN; BEGIN IS PRIME MINISTER
AND WE MUST CONTINUE TO DEAL WITH HIM. BUT WE SHOULD
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NOT BE SURPRISED AS WE FACE WHAT INEVITABLY WILL BE
A TUMULTUOUS FUTURE. ON THE OTHER HAND, WE SHOULD NOT
DELUDE OURSELVES THAT THESE EXPECTED CHANGES, IF AND
WHEN THEY OCCUR, WILL NECESSARILY BE FOR THE BETTER.
FOR ONE THING, WE MUST BE PREPARED FOR THE COMPLAINTS
OF THOSE WHO ARE OUSTED AS A RESULT OF ANY CHANGE,
AND PERHAPS FROM MOST ISRAELIS, THAT OUR MEDDLING WAS
RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CHANGES. FOR ANOTHER THING, IF THE
CHANGES ARE EXTENSIVE, AND PARTICULARLY IF THEY INVOLVE
MAJOR CABINET FIGURES OR BEGIN HIMSELF, THEY WILL
RESULT IN A LOSS OF PROGRESS IN NEGOTIATIONS. THAT LOSS OF
PROGRESS, WHILE PERHAPS TEMPORARY AND CERTAINLY UNDESIRABLE,
WILL BE INEVITABLE.

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